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**ANALYSIS OF BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY
IN EAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SINO-U.S. RELATIONS**

BY

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**Analysis of Ballistic Missile Defense Policy in East Asia:
Implications for Sino-U.S. Relations**

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ABSTRACT

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The vital U.S. national interests of protecting the homeland, citizens abroad and deployed military forces are significantly threatened by current and emerging ballistic missile-capable nations, states of concern and other potentially hostile international organizations. The Asia-Pacific region is increasingly important to U.S. economic health and security. China's long-term goals may include regional hegemony and fierce competition with the United States. Chinese national interests could easily become the source of significant regional conflict in East Asia. Given the stated intent of the current administration to begin deployment of a national missile defense system and the continued development of several theater missile defense systems, the U.S. is at a critical security policy crossroad. Analysis of ballistic missile defense policy in the context of East Asia and the interests of the People's Republic of China will contribute to an understanding of the likely outcomes of the decision to deploy missile defenses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ANALYSIS OF BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY OPTIONS IN EAST ASIA	1
INTRODUCTION	1
BALLISTIC MISSILE PROLIFERATION: A CURRENT AND FUTURE THREAT	2
U.S. AND CHINESE NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS	3
U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY	14
POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE INTERESTS	15
CONCLUSION	17
ENDNOTES	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	23

ANALYSIS OF BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY IN EAST ASIA

INTRODUCTION

A key feature of United States National Security Strategy is the imperative of countering weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These weapons are varied in their methods of destruction, means of delivery and technological sophistication. In order to achieve interagency synergy and security in the face of a growing threat, the government must effectively focus effort and clearly state national security strategy. The country is now at a critical decision point. Will the U.S. proceed with resolve to develop and field a family of missile defense systems at the theater and national levels, or will it curtail those activities in partial concession to mounting international opposition?

Ballistic missiles capable of mass destruction and intimidation are among the most significant threats to the security of the United States today and for the foreseeable future. The vital interests of protecting the homeland, citizens abroad and deployed military forces are at risk without an effective theater or national missile defense. In the post-Cold War era of regional instability and competition there is an increasing number of ballistic missile-capable rogue or failed states, potentially hostile international organizations and traditional competitors who possess the means and will to either employ such weapons or coerce others with the threat of their use.¹ Longstanding international nuclear deterrence regimes and U.S. conventional and strategic dominance are less effective in the context of small scale contingencies or instances of regional conflict that do not threaten vital national interests.

The very complex and politically charged decision on whether or not the U.S. should forge on with missile defenses will be made in the context of a wide variety of considerations. Among those considerations are budgetary constraints, international politics, technological limitations and assessments of the missile threat around the world. This paper seeks to highlight certain aspects of missile defense policy decisions in a regional context. The focus is on the major U.S. interests that affect the policy and the interests of the People's Republic of China (PRC). No regional security appraisal of East Asia is worthwhile without a keen understanding of the PRC's security posture. The introduction of U.S. theater missile defense (TMD) systems in East Asia and the development of a U.S. National Missile Defense (NMD) are adamantly opposed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership. The intent of this paper is to contribute analysis that is useful in the debate over whether or not to proceed aggressively with missile defenses. The analysis can also serve as a framework for anticipating Chinese reactions once a decision

is made. That understanding may well be the key to maximizing U.S. opportunities in its relations with China in the wake of the course that is charted by the new administration.

BALLISTIC MISSILE PROLIFERATION: A CURRENT AND FUTURE THREAT

The essence of the challenge for the future as stated in A National Security Strategy for a New Century is that “proliferation of advanced weapons and technologies threatens to provide rogue states, terrorists and international crime organizations with the means to inflict terrible damage on the United States, our allies and U.S. citizens and troops abroad.”² This threat is added to the global strategic nuclear balance and related forms of international arms control norms. Countering this threat requires more than the traditional deterrence that we have relied upon during the Cold War and since in the context of a system of fairly stable and predictable states. The prospects for regional actors threatening U.S. interests and allies are a focus of our military strategy as well.

“... it is likely that more than one aspiring regional power will have both the desire and means to challenge the United States militarily. Iran, Iraq, and North Korea currently pose this challenge, with no guarantee that these threats will diminish significantly soon.”³

In addition to the cited rogue states (more recently termed states of concern by the State Department) of Iran, Iraq and North Korea, the potential exists for others to expand their influence. Proliferation of WMD or related technology and components to states that can now or soon will be able acquire them can lead to instability and even aggression.

“Some may attempt to become dominant in a region, intimidating U.S. allies and friends, pursuing interests hostile to our own, and developing asymmetric capabilities, including nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the means to deliver them”⁴

The grim reality is that over 30 countries, including China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya now possess theater ballistic missiles, many with ranges in excess of 500 kilometers.⁵ In addition to rogue states and emerging regional threats, more stable states with known strategic nuclear weapons capabilities have the potential to become threats to U.S. security. They could also use their missile forces as a counter to U.S. regional influence. Government and private studies on the future of ballistic missile threats vary in their assessments of how serious the threat will be in the next 10 or 15 years.⁶ The essence of the debate is not whether or not there are ballistic missile threats to the United States at the theater and intercontinental level. It is whether or not additional countries, not already restrained by international arms control and the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation, are likely to acquire weapons in an international market

characterized by proliferation and a globalization of access to technology. Another key is whether or not an entity, once in possession of the capability, has the intent to target the United States, its forces or its allies. China is an obvious example of a state with considerable strategic capability as well as theater level ballistic missiles that we do not consider as an immediate threat but a state that we must engage and monitor. In fact, the proposed NMD is not intended to counter Chinese intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

Among the regions of the world holding the greatest economic and security interest to the U.S. is East Asia. Nearly one-third of all U.S. exports go to Asia and the effect on the domestic economy dictates that the “security and prosperity of Asia become, therefore, key elements of our foreign policy.”⁷ No regional strategy for East Asia is credible without a thorough understanding of the interests and sensitivities of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Chinese national interests could conceivably become the source of significant regional conflict in East Asia. China’s long-term goals may well include regional hegemony and fierce competition with the US.

The balance of this paper will present a discussion of key aspects of U.S. and Chinese national interests and analysis of U.S. missile defense policy in the context of Sino-U.S. relations.

U.S. AND CHINESE NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

According to most official pronouncements on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, the U.S. and the PRC have quite compatible interests and goals. However, as China advances economically, technologically and militarily, there is a natural reaction on the part of its neighbors and the U.S. to take note and consider the possible impacts of its role as a more assertive regional actor. Similarly, it would be foolish not to recognize that an understandably suspicious China scrutinizes actions of the world’s only superpower very carefully. The effect is a situation where misunderstanding and inept diplomacy can lead to destabilizing competition and heightened potential for overt conflict.

It is useful to examine the dynamics of U.S. defense policy in the context of the protection of its interests in East Asia from a growing missile threat. The U.S. assessment of Chinese security policy and political intentions is critical to any future policy of its own. A discussion of China’s demonstrated security policy and views on its motivations will serve to frame the choices that the U.S. must make as it proceeds with NMD and TMD development.

US INTERESTS AND BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY

The three pillars of U.S. national security strategy are shaping the international environment, responding to threats and crises, and preparing for an uncertain future.⁸ Elements of the strategy to counter WMD, and particularly nuclear ballistic weapons are evident in each of the three pillars.

Shaping

“The United States seeks to shape the international environment through a variety of means, including diplomacy, economic cooperation, international assistance, arms control and non-proliferation, and health initiatives. These activities enhance U.S. security by promoting regional security; enhancing economic progress; supporting military activities, international law enforcement cooperation, and environmental efforts; and preventing, reducing or deterring the diverse threats we face.”⁹

Among the most visible steps taken to shape the security environment are diplomatic efforts to prevent states from marketing WMD and related technology. Frequent targets of U.S. criticism and public diplomacy are Russia and China. “U.S. officials maintain that if China wants to lay claim to great-power status, its behavior must start conforming with global norms, beginning with the transfer of technologies and materials that can produce mass-destruction weapons.”¹⁰ Despite considerable effort to shape the environment, there is a realization that threats do exist, and are likely to increase.

Responding

Among the response options in the face of nuclear WMD is the development of national and theater missile defense systems (NMD and TMD). The internationally contentious issue of a U.S. NMD is addressed in the National Security Strategy.

“We are committed to meeting the growing danger posed by nations developing and deploying long range missiles that could deliver weapons of mass destruction against the United States ... We intend to determine in 2000 whether to deploy a limited national missile defense against ballistic missile threats to the United States from rogue states.”¹¹

The intensity of the national interest to protect U.S. territory from nuclear attack is of the highest order. The implication of the proliferation trend is that a rogue state or other actor in a small scale regional conflict is not likely to be deterred by the long-standing strategic deterrence environment that contributed to relative peace throughout the Cold War. The Security Strategy outlines four criteria for the decision on whether or not to deploy an NMD to counter the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) threat: “(1) whether the threat is materializing; (2) the

status of the technology based on an initial series of rigorous flight tests, and the proposed system's operational effectiveness; (3) whether the system is affordable; (4) the implications that going forward with NMD deployment would hold for the overall strategic environment and our arms control objectives, including efforts to achieve further reductions in strategic nuclear arms under START II and START III.”¹² The intent to link the decision to implications for the strategic arms control environment and specifically renegotiation of the ABM Treaty is significant.¹³ Recent events show that European and Russian opposition to a U.S. defense against ICBMs affected Clinton administration consideration of NMD as a viable option.¹⁴ The National Missile Defense Act of 1999 passed by Congress and signed by the President clearly states that the U.S. will deploy an NMD as soon as it is technologically feasible. “Many in Congress argued that the administration is disingenuous in arguing that a decision to deploy an NMD has not yet been made. By signing the legislation, the political decision to deploy an NMD has been made.”¹⁵ The apparent confusion and difference of opinion over how to proceed may well continue, making political consensus and related action on NMD deployment problematic. The Chinese are likewise opposed to U.S. development and deployment of NMD.

While recent negotiations with the Russians have cast some doubt over the clear dividing lines between TMD and NMD, it is reasonably safe to consider some forms of TMD allowable under the ABM Treaty.¹⁶

President Bush has repeatedly demonstrated commitment to NMD. However, the uncertainty cast by international opposition to U.S. plans, the restraints of the ABM Treaty, the huge cost of such a system and the considerable technical challenges are all potential impediments to NMD fruition. The heart of any justification certainly must be based on current and future threats. A compelling threat to a vital national interest is the surest catalyst for consensus and action on the missile defense front.

Preparing

Among the imperatives cited as necessary for effective preparation for an uncertain future are; (1) “we must have a strong, competitive, technologically superior, innovative and responsive industrial and research and development base”; (2) “prudent steps to position ourselves to counter unlikely but significant future threats, particularly asymmetric threats.”¹⁷ Development and deployment of a limited NMD would seem to be in concert with these imperatives. The research and development and related technology in the NMD program are clearly at the forward edge of innovation. Since some of the NMD program components such

as sensors and communications are space-based, there are other implications for national security.

"We are committed to maintaining U.S. leadership in space. Unimpeded access to and use of space is a vital national interest – essential for protecting U.S. national security, promoting our prosperity and ensuring our well-being... We will maintain our technological superiority in space systems, and sustain a robust space industry and a strong, forward-looking research base. We also will continue efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction to space"¹⁸

Currently, the U.S. does not have any defense of its territory against ICBMs launched by a rogue state or other entity, except for traditional nuclear deterrence that might not be enough, given threat trends. Therefore, we are at some considerable risk between now and 2010 if our assessment of threat trends is accurate. The National Missile Defense would provide protection if proven, developed and deployed. The crux of the dilemma in East Asia is whether or not China's capabilities and its intent to further develop missile capabilities are sufficient justification to proceed with missile defense.

CHINA AS PERCEIVED BY THE U.S.

Consensus on how to characterize Chinese political and military intentions is absent in government and academic circles. As in any complex matter, there are disparate views. For the purpose of discussion and analysis, two extreme characterizations of China are useful.

The first characterization is pessimistic. Here, the Chinese Communist Party is focused on achieving regional hegemony and much greater international influence. The leadership is willing to sacrifice human rights and the environment in its quest to increase national power. It rejects many Western and international norms unless advantage can be gained from some minimum level of conformity. China maintains a righteous insulation from the non-Communist world, exhibiting xenophobia and institutional paranoia. Some observers of Chinese history and the current situation posit that "... China, despite an awareness of its relative weakness, might nevertheless be willing to use force against the United States or in a way that runs a major risk of U.S. involvement. In using force in this way, China would be primarily seeking to achieve a political effect."¹⁹ Modernization is a means of achieving an improvement in China's power position relative to the U.S. and its Asian neighbors.

Strategic responses to this pessimistic view are likely to include a hard-line U.S. approach to security policy and aggressive protection of national interests. U.S. diplomacy in this context would seek to compel China to conform to Western standards. The U.S. would maintain an active role on the economic and political stages of East Asia, asserting superpower status and

leadership. Diplomatic realism would be the order of the day as China would be seen as a geopolitical powerhouse with the potential to threaten the U.S. and its allies. U.S. engagement with China would be from a position of strength. Alliances and the umbrella of protection extended to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan would not be subject to any compromise. The effort put into NMD and TMD, as a way of protecting interests and forward presence, would multiply.

The second characterization of China is optimistic. Here the Communist Party would focus primarily on modernization and economic development. There is evidence to suggest that this is a plausible future. "In pursuit of modernization, the leadership has greatly relaxed its internal controls over the population and has opened the country to foreign influences."²⁰ The main concern would be improving the quality of life for its huge population on its own terms, thereby maintaining Party legitimacy and survival. Armed conflict would be avoided and seen as an obstacle to progress. The main security concerns would be internal to China or on the immediate periphery in places like Tibet, Viet Nam, and Taiwan. China would show evidence of participating meaningfully with international organizations and abiding by international norms.

"PRC leaders gave attention to China's periphery, whose security was essential to having breathing space for economic development. *Zhoubian* diplomacy in the 1990s amounted to a highly active and visible diplomatic offensive to recover China's international standing ... China established diplomatic relations with Singapore (1990), Brunei (1991), South Korea (1992), and the four Central Asian states of the former USSR (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan; 1992-1993). Beijing also normalized relations with Mongolia and Laos (1990) and with Vietnam (1991); signed a boundary agreement with Laos and agreed with Vietnam to settle border disputes peacefully (1992); and restored relations with Indonesia (in 1990, after a suspension of twenty-three years). Ties with India ... also improved."²¹

China is increasingly open to the outside world, shedding some of its xenophobic behavior. The 1980s and 1990s saw other groundbreaking initiatives on the international scene including "a major expansion of trade and diplomatic activities in 1990 with ASEAN," the creation of special economic zones for international trade and investment, and membership in the Asian Development Bank.²² Of great significance is the improved relationship with Russia, marked by President Yeltsin's visit to China in 1996. The promise of a complementary trade relationship and mutual respect for each other's problems in Chechnya, Tibet and Taiwan are mainstays of the growing connections, which on occasion results in a joint stance against U.S. influence.²³ China essentially acts in its own self-interest, seeking international participation on a footing with the likes of the EU, Japan, Russia and the United States. Increases in favorable

trade are more important than ideological differences. Different systems can co-exist and interact, so long as China is able to maintain its sovereignty.

U.S. policy response to this view would be characterized by a persuasive style of engagement. The U.S. would encourage China to further adopt international standards of fair trade and international security transparency in order to reduce the potential for conflict. Investment in China would be seen as a way to foster greater ties and mutual economic benefit. Long term engagement and a partnership approach to Chinese relations could result in democratic reform in China. There would be a belief that friction with China is caused mainly by misunderstanding and misinformation rather than conflicts of interest or ideology. Certainly, as a rational actor on the international stage the U.S. could reach compromise and accept some risks to its own interests in order to achieve an acceptable settlement with China. In this case, respect for China's sovereignty might lead the U.S. to accept some risk in the area of missile defense for deployed troops and allies. Chinese agreement to comply with military transparency measures and willingness to settle disputes peacefully might be enough to curtail or postpone development and deployment of missile defense systems in the region. Missile defense options in this case are more likely to include mobile U.S. systems that are primarily designed for protection of U.S. assets. Stationing of permanent missile defenses in Japan or Taiwan and joint development of those systems would be seen as too contentious and counter to a healthy relationship with China. National Missile Defense would be similarly viewed as counter to interests in pursuit of a true partnership with China.

CHINA'S INTERESTS AND SENSITIVITIES

An accurate assessment of China's true intentions and an understanding of its motivations are essential to formulating and executing successful security policy in East Asia. Deployments of U.S. missile defense systems would certainly have a negative impact on China's perception of regional security and its own influence. Theater missile defenses provided to Taiwan, Japan and South Korea could effectively negate the large investments China has made in its short and medium range missile programs in recent years. National missile defense of the United States could negate any international leverage China might hope to achieve with its newer long-range nuclear-capable missiles.

"The Chinese worry that a U.S. NMD would undermine the credibility of China's nuclear deterrent force, for which China has paid dearly over the past four decades in an effort to assert its independence from the superpowers and enhance its claim to great power status. They are concerned that even the C-1 system, in which eventually 100 interceptors would be deployed at a single site in Alaska, could potentially intercept all of China's current arsenal, which reportedly

consists of about 20 single-warhead ICBMs capable of reaching the continental United States.”²⁴

International Prestige

China’s national pride and natural appetite for international prestige are potent sources of policy motivation. China’s interest in being a great power and influential member of the international community is seriously compromised if the U.S. develops effective TMD and NMD systems. Its own development of nuclear weapons and strategic missiles has been a major feature of China’s pursuit of great power status. Many observers of China agree that its willingness to spend precious capital on modernization of its arsenal of weapons and forces is intended to counter what it considers to be the hegemonic ambitions of the U.S.²⁵ Recent Chinese advances in their space program are further evidence of Chinese intent to gain higher order national capabilities for the future as well as the national prestige that accompanies successful access to space. “China sees manned space flight as key to securing its international status and economic survival.”²⁶ A viable space program puts China in elite company with Russia and the U.S.

Modernization and Economic Development

In addition to enhancing international status and influence, a consummate interest of the CCP is modernization and parallel economic development. China knows it must achieve economic growth in order to compete internationally. It must also satisfy its huge population that it can no longer shield from the enviable conditions of the developed West. The primacy of economic development interests in relation to military capability may best be summed up by a passage from China’s official White Paper entitled “China’s National Defense in 2000.” In a listing of the means by which China expects to achieve security and guarantee sovereignty it includes;

“- Subordinating national defense to, and placing it in the service of, the nation’s overall economic construction, and achieving their coordinated development. Developing the economy and strengthening national defense are two strategic tasks in China’s modernization efforts. The Chinese government insists that economic development be taken as the center, while defense work be subordinate to and in the service of the nation’s overall economic construction.”²⁷

China recognizes the obvious relationship and complementarities between improvements in defense and economic development. While military power can lead to stability and opportunities for favorable international trade or market access, there is an inherent budgetary conflict between aggressive defense spending and prosperity. It is fair to say that there is not

universal acceptance of the premise that defense must be subordinated so decisively in favor of other forms of modernization.

"Whereas in the 1980s the Chinese decided to downplay and, in fact, delay, defence modernization as dependent on, and a function of, economic growth, now some high-ranking PLA leaders suggest (still indirectly and unofficially) that it is the other way around: continued growth is dependent on, and a function of, defence modernization."²⁸

The defense spending debate in China is much the same as in the U.S., except that the need for economic progress is much more chronic. China has been careful to avoid spending too much on its military at the risk of derailing economic growth. Some estimates of Chinese annual defense outlays are in the range of \$45 billion (including the published military budget of \$14.6 and other forms of defense spending) in contrast to the U.S. defense budget for 2000 that was \$293.3 billion.²⁹ The Chinese leadership is compelled to focus limited defense spending in areas that reap the maximum perceived increases in security. They also tend to invest in military weapon programs that have good potential for foreign sales and profit. Recent emphasis on missile weaponry can be seen as a cost-effective means of gaining military strength.

"Many think of missiles as expensive. In fact, they are quite cheap compared to armies, navies, and air forces. To the extent a country wants to assert influence in the region and does not want to be dissuaded from doing that by a Western country, clearly a ballistic missile with a weapon of mass destruction is attractive."³⁰

Given its fiscal constraints, it is easy to understand China's emphasis on ballistic missiles. Here also lies the essence of China's strong opposition to future U.S. missile defenses. Systems that could negate the advantages of China's ballistic missiles would render much of the investment in those missiles wasted and prevent it from gaining power cheaply. Chinese options in the face of NMD and TMD systems are limited. They could increase the numbers of missiles in the arsenal in order to overwhelm missile defenses. They could generate the military ability to counter, penetrate or attack NMD and TMD systems. All options would require significant increases in military spending and inherent risk to the more vital interest of sustained economic growth. Some would say that continued improvement in the standard of living is key to the CCP's legitimacy and ability to stay in power. "To the extent that the regime is successful in promoting China's comprehensive national power ... it may expect that its legitimacy will be enhanced. So far, the country's economic success has been remarkable and has been a positive factor with respect to legitimacy."³¹

Survival

Besides interests related to international standing and economic health, a case can be made that the CCP is motivated by a threat to its very survival. With the fall of most of the Communist governments in the world over the last 11 years, it is likely that Chinese leaders think they must work hard and act decisively in order to continue to remain in power.³² The CCP is steadfast in its one-party Communist system, but it is also willing to take measured steps toward a more open and progressive economy in order to interact with the increasingly competitive and global world marketplace. It knows that it must open up incrementally to the forces of globalism and international political and economic organizations. In order to survive as the undisputed domestic power, there is a need to protect, at all costs, the control that guarantees Party dominance and freedom of action. Threats to Chinese sovereignty and to the survival of the Communist Party can take many forms. “As far as Beijing was – and remains – concerned … the principal threat to its continued rule came from what it began to call the insidious American policy of “peaceful evolution.” Moreover, the execution of the Ceausescus in Romania brought home to the Chinese Communist Party leadership the possible consequences of losing power.”³³ The kinds of democratic reforms and challenges to the CCP fostered by the demonstrators at Tienanmen Square in 1989 represent lingering threats. The major source of external meddling in Chinese domestic affairs is considered to be the United States. Many in the U.S. consider the spread of democracy and economic interdependence to be the keys to long-term stability. Support of democracy and human rights in China is a means to an end that does not include one-party rule. Understandably, the Party is vehemently opposed to any attempts to impose Western standards of governance and it moves swiftly to quell any suggestion that the enlightened Communist leadership is not acting in the best interests of its citizens.

Sovereignty

Sovereignty in a classic sense is also a concern of the Chinese leadership. China is a large country with a very long border and a troublesome number of territorial disputes. While among the most homogenous populations in the world, there are still a number of minorities that are concentrated in some of the more remote and underdeveloped border regions of the country. Strict internal control by CCP authorities is seen as the essential means of maintaining stability and preventing separatism. The issue of Tibetan independence is the most obvious example of internal unrest that has the potential to turn into a major challenge to Chinese sovereignty. Contested territory is among the most combustible of international problems.

China sees itself as being threatened by the United States and countries on its periphery that have challenged or questioned their sovereignty.

Lingering security concerns and competition with Vietnam in the South China Sea are matters of great concern for China. Disputes over possession of the Spratly Islands, while not likely to result in open combat any time soon, have caused both sides to reinforce their military presence. Vietnam has garrisoned islands and is taking steps within its meager means to enhance its naval capability.³⁴ Oilfields and trade routes in the area raise the stakes for respective territorial claims of sovereignty. There are indicators that China's naval force projection capabilities are improving in response.³⁵

Farther north on China's periphery are the countries of Japan and the Republic of Korea, both strong allies of the United States. Aggression by Japan as symbolized by the 1937 Nanjing Massacre has not been forgotten.³⁶ Perceived aggression on the Korean peninsula by Americans and the rest of General MacArthur's United Nations force during the Korean conflict has also had an impact on the Chinese view of the world, its neighbors and particularly the United States. The sensitivities of China to external threats and competition are documented in a white paper published recently by the Information Office of the State Council entitled China's National Defense in 2000. The following excerpts reveal the depth of Chinese mistrust of U.S. involvement in East Asia and, in particular, their opposition to TMD and NMD.

- In a clear reference to the U.S. and what is perceived as heavy-handed power politics, "Certain big powers are pursuing 'neo-interventionism,' 'Neo-gunboat policy' and 'neo-economic colonialism', which are seriously damaging the sovereignty, independence and developmental interests of many countries, and threatening world peace and security."³⁷

- Another reference to the U.S. decries TMD and NMD development. "... a certain country is still continuing its efforts to develop and introduce the National Missile Defense (NMD) and Theater Missile Defense (TMD) systems, which have undermined the international community's efforts to stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to promote disarmament."³⁸

- "There are new negative developments in the security of the Asia-Pacific region. The United States is further strengthening its military presence and bilateral military alliances in this region, advocating the development of the TMD system and planning to deploy it in East Asia."³⁹

The PRC seems fairly comfortable in its ability to deal on a bilateral basis with Japan and Korea even though they are more economically sophisticated. The major threat to sovereignty comes in the form of regional competitors with a strong alliance to the United States. The umbrella of protection provided by American forces and U.S. diplomatic commitment tilts the balance of power in the region against China. This is seen as a limit on their ability to act with

autonomy and on an equal international footing. China's ballistic missile program is widely considered as an equalizer in the region for a PLA that is not very adept at projecting power. The capability to launch missiles from China against any target in East Asia, and with ICBMs even against the continental United States, gives the PRC considerable leverage.

Perhaps a good example of the relationship between China's missile arsenal and its resistance to outside interference by the U.S. is a recent official announcement. The same day that China criticized the U.S. for selling arms to Taiwan, they revealed a successful test of a new long-range missile capable of reaching the US.⁴⁰ Missiles are among the few forms of deterrence that China has to offset the power and influence of the US. In that light, it is understandable that the Chinese are so vigorously opposed to TMD and NMD.

Without doubt, gaining absolute sovereignty over Taiwan is among the most important national objectives for China. "More significantly, Chinese researchers contend that the Taiwan issue is the one dispute most likely to drag China to the brink of war in the foreseeable future. Beijing also views Taiwan as the most important issue in its bilateral relationship with Washington."⁴¹ While the U.S. has agreed in principle that Taiwan is historically and culturally synonymous with China and that China's proposed "One Country, Two Systems" method of integration is acceptable, it has defended democratic Taiwan's right to have a say in the actual terms of any future integration with greater China. The 1979 Taiwan relations Act is the basis for U.S. security guarantees. The threat of forcible integration by an increasingly capable PLA has caused many lawmakers in the U.S. to take a strong stance against Chinese posturing and made them more inclined toward selling Taiwan sophisticated weaponry. The result is an escalation of tension across the Taiwan Strait and a political climate in Taiwan that has emboldened those who resist integration. The Chinese reaction to what it sees as an increasingly independent-minded Taiwan has included strong rhetoric and military actions designed to demonstrate its commitment to claims of sovereignty. In an apparent response to a visit to the United States by President Lee of Taiwan, China conducted several missile tests between July 18th and July 23rd 1995 with missiles landing within 90 miles of the North Coast of the island.⁴² In March prior to the 1996 Taiwan elections, China conducted a series of army, navy and air force operations in the area of the Taiwan Strait that also included the firing of four missiles that landed less than 50 miles from major Taiwanese ports.⁴³ The message sent loud and clear across the strait to the Taiwanese citizenry and across the Pacific to the United States is that China will not accept any challenge to its sovereignty over Taiwan.

U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY

US missile defenses figure prominently in each of the four Chinese national interests discussed above. Therefore, the future of Sino-U.S. relations is sure to be affected by the related decisions and policies made concerning both deployment of missile defenses and Chinese modernization and expansion of its missile forces.

In the broad strategic sense, The U.S. has two real options for its family of missile defense initiatives. The first is to proceed with resolve to attain and deploy missile defense capabilities, both NMD and TMD. The main alternative is to seek compromise and Chinese cooperation on a range of other issues in exchange for U.S. concession on its plans to deploy missile defenses that could counter Chinese missiles. The current U.S. president has stated in certain terms that his administration will deploy a NMD as soon as possible and not be deterred by international opposition or the restraints of the outdated 1972 ABM Treaty. According to newly appointed Secretary of Defense, a staunch supporter of NMD himself,

“No U.S. president can responsibly say that his defense policy is calculated and designed to leave the American people undefended against threats that are known to exist,” ... He said Bush would not wait until technology can provide for a perfect defense, but he mentioned no timetable. “It is not so much a technical question as a matter of a president’s constitutional responsibility ... Indeed, it is in many respects ... a moral issue.”⁴⁴

While the resolve of the administration could wane incrementally in the face of a host of pressures, the remainder of this discussion will proceed on the presumption that the U.S. policy will be one of commitment to fielding missile defenses at the theater and national levels. For that policy option, it is important to consider China’s interests as previously identified. U.S. strategy should act to safeguard its interests and whenever possible, accommodate Chinese sensitivities. As with nearly all policy decisions, there are going to be major undesirable second and third order effects. The potential for damage to the Sino-U.S. relationship is great. In order to avoid detrimental effects on the Sino-US relationship, it would be prudent to offer cooperation and incentives in other areas of common interest. The stakes are high for China and for the future of U.S. influence in East Asia. On the whole, there is a fundamental conflict between missile defenses and Chinese interests. The broad response of China will most certainly be spirited opposition. The United States must be prepared to withstand considerable international pressure and bilateral combativeness. One might also predict a tilt in the character of the bilateral relationship toward greater competition rather than cooperation if the NMD issue is not handled deftly. While the prospects for Sino-US relations are bleak in the case of a resolute stance by the US, proponents of the strategy would point to greater long-term regional stability

and enduring U.S. influence in the region as favorable outcomes. An understanding of the Chinese perspective may be helpful in mitigating the negative aspects of resolute missile defense policy. China, as is the case with most rational nations, has shown a reluctant willingness to compromise certain interests when a case can be made for overall benefit in other areas. While their skepticism remains high and their enthusiasm limited, China has participated in regional confidence building measures with neighbors, ASEAN and even the United States.⁴⁵ The following analysis highlights some key considerations that follow logically from the discussion of Chinese interests. The intended result is insight into the effects and opportunities inherent in the option the current U.S. administration intends to pursue.

POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE INTERESTS

China's path toward great power status, at first glance, seems to be threatened by U.S. missile defenses. China's strategic missile arsenal is intended in part to "demonstrate China's international power."⁴⁶ Even though the stated purpose of U.S. missile defense is to counter rogue states like North Korea, Iran and Iraq, an unintended consequence is a threat to the relative balance of power that China seeks to achieve. While the PRC's ICBM force is relatively small and unsophisticated, it currently has the ability to hit the continental United States that is defenseless against that type of attack. The resultant political and military leverage is a very real and intended component of China's strategy for curbing U.S. power in East Asia where it sees itself as the emerging power broker.

"... many in China believe that the proposed U.S. development and deployment of ballistic missile defenses at home and in East Asia pose potentially serious implications for China's ability to use its nuclear weapons to deter possible U.S. aggression, pressure, intimidation or other actions, including the possible U.S. military intervention against a Chinese military operation against Taiwan."⁴⁷

The obvious question is; how can the U.S. reassure China that missile defenses are not a threat to its stature in the world or its claim of sovereignty over Taiwan? China would need to be convinced that the U.S. does not intend to challenge its interests or assert unchecked power in the region."

Continued engagement, a wide spectrum of cooperative agreements, commercial ties and other confidence-building measures can be effective in soothing some of China's suspicions. U.S. support for Chinese membership in the World Trade Organization is an example of policy that would act to bolster Chinese international prestige.⁴⁸ Collaboration with China on regional issues such as the future of the Korean Peninsula, if pursued in a spirit of respect, could act to enhance China's sense of international and regional leadership.

While China knows that it is far from competing on an equal footing with the US, it is concerned that the extension of U.S. power through alliance, technology transfer, or forward deployed forces in other countries in East Asia has the effect of reducing its influence. There may be an opportunity to enhance China's role through multilateral agreements that include U.S. assurances that it will not pursue potentially destabilizing reinforcement of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Appealing to China's interest in economic development may be the surest way of mitigating the potential for dents in the Sino-U.S. relationship. On the positive side, the U.S. can point to the substantial trade surplus China enjoys and U.S. value for Chinese trade as the basis for mutual dependence and partnership. Liberalization of U.S. policies governing technology transfer would be a very popular initiative. Besides assisting Chinese modernization efforts, which might mean more profits for U.S. companies and savings on the part of China if they decide it will allow them to curtail their costly espionage program. Any actions that serve to increase Chinese access to the U.S. market for goods would be received favorably. This could act to tip the balance of the internal Chinese debate over primacy of industrial modernization or defense spending away from defense.

There are economic disincentives for Chinese competition with the U.S. in the area of missile forces. U.S. resolve to produce a missile defense means that China can chose to increase its missile capability to defeat those defenses, beginning a form of arms race. Upgrading either the penetration capability of China's current missile force or producing significantly more missiles will incur significant costs. The U.S. can make the points that: advanced missilery is expensive to produce and maintain; NMD and TMD systems are likely to be highly effective against China's current arsenal; and the U.S. is in a much better fiscal position to win any contemplated arms race. The U.S. can also act quickly to restrict imports and cripple the Chinese economy that is so dependent on trade in response to Chinese recalcitrance or belligerent behavior.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the U.S. efforts to reassure China and maintain a constructive partnership will be the predictable hostility of the CCP leadership. The only things likely to soften this stance are U.S. concessions to Party objections over meddling in their internal affairs. A U.S. option would be to relax criticism of the Party's authoritarian style of government and refrain from overt support to the democracy movement in China. A moderation of U.S. rhetoric that targets human rights abuses would also be appreciated. Symbolic diplomatic acts that reinforce CCP legitimacy could have the effect of soothing Party concerns that it is under attack by an increasingly aggressive superpower. Although it is already a feature

of the U.S. position, assurances that missile defenses are not aimed at China can stress that there is no intent to challenge or gain power over the Chinese leadership. The point that China has vowed never to use ICBMs in a first strike is significant.⁴⁹ Public praise for that principle could be helpful, particularly in light of the fact that NMD is intended mainly to guard against those that would contemplate a first strike. While the chances of the U.S. being able to significantly reassure the CCP that it is not a threat to their continued survival are slim, U.S. actions may be able to, at least, minimize antagonism and gain a reciprocal reduction in public combativeness.

As previously noted, the Chinese goal of the reunification of Taiwan is the most contentious factor affecting Sino-U.S. relations. This sovereignty issue, while being the root of much of China's opposition to missile defense systems, can also represent an opportunity. Resolution of the issue in favor of China might eliminate many of the objections China has to U.S. influence in East Asia. Any considerable increase in U.S. support for the "One China, Two Systems" approach to reunification would be received favorably. Demonstration that the U.S. is not committed to long-term Taiwanese independence is a prerequisite for any thawing of relations. Refusal to sell advanced ships, aircraft and theater missile defenses could go a long way toward appeasing sovereignty concerns and moderating objections to U.S. missile defenses. The suggestion here is that a softening of the U.S. interpretation of the Taiwan Relations Act could serve to elicit a less suspicious Chinese tone and constructive bilateral relations, even in the face of NMD deployment.

The effectiveness of various initiatives to mitigate negative consequences for Sino-U.S. relations in the context of resolute NMD development may be questionable. The preceding examples are a mere sampling designed to illustrate the need to consider certain, arguably critical, Chinese interests. They may also be difficult to reconcile with the associated diplomatic and security risks if the U.S. intends to take a broadly competitive approach to relations with China. Fundamentally though, the question is whether or not the U.S. will pursue parallel measures in an attempt to prevent a destabilizing change in the character of the bilateral relationship with China as it develops and deploys a family of weapons that have a huge impact on current perceptions of security in East Asia.

CONCLUSION

U.S. regional security policy for East Asia must be viewed in the context of Chinese interests and sensitivities as well as U.S. interests. Chinese perceptions of national interest largely explain their actions and can be used to assist in anticipating their reactions to U.S.

policy. The preceding analysis serves to highlight the impact of the missile defense decision on Sino-US relations. It suggests some of the possible consequences or opportunities that the missile defense options have for the Sino-US relationship. While these considerations cover only a small number of the many complex variables in the U.S. calculus for future missile defense policy, they serve to provide insight into the security dynamics of perhaps the most promising region for growth in the future global economy.

Word Count: 7,607

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